

Multiple Choice Exam

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ORIENTATION GUIDE



Personnel

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NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL
MULTIPLE-CHOICE EXAM ORIENTATION GUIDE

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Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Personnel has prepared this orientation guide for candidates who will participate in assembled examinations. The information in this booklet is designed to help candidates better understand the testing process. This guide also offers a systematic method of study to assist candidates in preparing for the examination.

The examination will be designed on the basis of information obtained from a job analysis of a targeted title. The job analysis provides a description of the duties performed by incumbents and identifies the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required to effectively perform each of these duties. We encourage candidates to review this guide carefully and to take advantage of any and all opportunities to prepare for the examination.

Why do candidates have to take an examination?

The selection process in New Jersey's Merit System is designed to provide all applicants with an equal opportunity to compete for a position. The examination will serve as one objective tool in this process. Test scores will be used to identify qualified candidates and to generate a ranked list of eligibles to be considered for appointment by each jurisdiction.

When and where will the examination be held?

In some situations, the **tentative** date to administer the examination may appear on the examination announcement. In other situations, the test date will be disseminated when examination notices are mailed two to three weeks prior to the test date. However, in the event there are difficulties scheduling the examination for any unforeseen reason, the examination date may change. Candidates may be scheduled to take the examination at various sites (north, central and south) throughout the state. Once candidates are notified of their scheduled examination center, directions can be obtained by calling the New Jersey Department of Personnel Information Center at (609) 292-8668. Directions may also be found on the Internet at the New Jersey Department of Personnel's Home Page (www.state.nj.us/personnel). Make sure to map out a travel route in advance of the examination date and plan to arrive at the examination center *early* since no one will be admitted late. Candidates will not be allowed to refer to this Orientation Guide after they arrive at the examination center.

Please note that candidates are NOT PERMITTED to bring phones, pagers, recording devices, etc., into the test center. Possession of one or more of these prohibited devices inside of the examination center may result in disqualification.

In addition, briefcases and other personal items should also be left outside of the test center. The Department of Personnel is not responsible for any personal items. Upon completion of the testing process, candidates must leave the testing premises so that other candidates (still involved in the testing) will not be disturbed/distracted by outside conversations.

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How is the examination developed?

A job analysis was conducted to identify the knowledge and abilities that are necessary to perform the job of the targeted title. A job analysis is the process of critically examining job components in order to provide a functional description of a job. As a part of this job analysis, staff from the Department of Personnel gathered information about the job through interviews and/or observations of on-the-job activities of incumbents (permanent employees). Based on this job analysis, several knowledge areas, skills and/or abilities (KSAs) were identified and rated as to their importance for job success. Examination questions will relate to those KSAs that were determined to be most critical.

What will the examination look like?

In the multiple-choice format, candidates will be provided a question preceded by a statement, a situation, or other stimulus such as a report or a reading passage. Candidates will then be given a series of possible choices to address the situation or question. In answering all questions, candidates are to assume the role of the targeted title.

Questions on this examination will have four choices from which candidates will select one answer which best addresses the problem or situation. Answer choices will be labeled as (a), (b), (c), and (d). Candidates will enter their answers on a standardized answer sheet. The answer chosen must be marked on the answer sheet. This is done by completely filling in the appropriate space on their answer sheet that designates the letter that corresponds to their answer choice. No credit will be awarded for any answer that is not properly marked on the answer sheet.

How will the examination be scored?

The scoring of the written examination will be based on the number of correct responses. There will be no penalties for wrong answers. That is, points will not be deducted for wrong answers. Therefore, it is in the candidate's best interest to answer all questions. If the answer to a question is not known, choose the BEST choice. Candidates should budget their time so that they can respond to all questions within the allotted time.

The written examination will be machine-scored. When candidates receive their answer sheet at the test center, it will show the number of questions to answer and the total time allotted to finish the test. Using a Number 2 pencil, candidates should blacken selected answers firmly, neatly, and completely. Candidates should mark only one answer for each question while making sure to erase cleanly any answer changes. Stray marks should be avoided.

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Are there preparation strategies for taking the examination?

Multiple-Choice Tests are designed to test knowledge of particular subject areas. Performance on a multiple-choice test can be improved in different ways. The first, and most obvious way, is to have a working knowledge of the relevant material that will be covered on the test. The second is to know and understand the test situation in order to avoid making mistakes caused by a failure to understand the meaning of the test questions, the test format, or the test procedures. Finally, candidates should try to gain an understanding of their test-taking behaviors and the kinds of errors that they tend to commit. This guide provides suggestions for improving test performance in each of these areas:

What to Study: Identifying Material that may Help you Prepare for the Test

This section gives you information on how to identify material that may help you best prepare for your test. It identifies some sources of study material based upon the job title for which you are applying.

How to Study: Understanding the Material Covered on the Test

This section provides some strategies for test preparation. A method for studying, based on well-established learning principles, is included. Many of the suggestions are directed toward enhancing the ability to recall information. This requires that candidates do more than simply read the material. Some suggested strategies include: (a) surveying the material to be read in order to break it down into reasonable study "chunks," (b) formulating questions to be answered after each section has been read, and (c) reciting and reviewing the main points of each section.

General Multiple-Choice Test-Taking Strategies: Understanding the Test Situation

This section provides some test taking strategies. These strategies are of relevance when taking any multiple-choice examination. They include such suggestions as marking questions in a way that will make them easier to understand and practices that will help identify the best option.

Error Analysis: Understanding Test-taking Behavior

This section provides the candidate with some information about common test-taking errors, as well as strategies for avoiding such errors. Candidates are encouraged to identify the kinds of errors typically made when taking multiple-choice examinations. In this way, each candidate will be more aware of his/her tendency toward these errors when actually taking the examination and can determine what steps to be taken to avoid these errors.

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1. What to Study

For many job announcements in the areas of Law Enforcement and Fire Fighting along with announcements for titles included in either the Supervisory Test Battery or the Managerial Test Battery, study material or information regarding specific study material, is provided on the Department of Personnel website: www.state.nj.us/personnel. However, in most cases, no formal guidance is given by the Department of Personnel regarding sources of study material. In these cases, the candidate's best course of action may be to become familiar with the requirements of the job and knowledge, skills or abilities (KSAs) that one meeting these requirements would be expected to possess. Remember, the KSAs required for success on the job are the basis for DOP tests. Since job analyses results are confidential and not made available to the public, the next best source of this information is the job specification for the title. Job specifications give a description of the job, the requirements, the tasks performed and the KSAs required to perform these tasks. By focusing your study efforts on material related to these areas you are helping yourself prepare for the examination. Job specifications for state and local Merit System titles are available on the DOP website.

1. How to Study

The study strategies provided here should be helpful in preparing for the Written Multiple-Choice Test. They can be applied to any resource material.

a.) Focusing Attention

The candidate must focus his/her attention on the material to be studied in order to retain it. There are three things that can be done to improve retention.

First, since people tend to pay closer attention to things that interest them than to things that don't, try to make the material more meaningful or interesting. One way to do this is to apply examples of the material back to the workplace.

Another practice is eliminating distractions from the environment. These distractions compete for an individual's attention and affect recall of the material studied. It is difficult to pay attention to several things at the same time. Instead, people usually switch back and forth, paying attention first to one thing and then the other. Unfortunately, material not given attention will not be remembered. This means that listening to the radio while studying, or studying in a noisy area, will leave gaps in the candidate's memory of the material trying to be learned.

Finally, avoid trying to learn material when tired. Fatigue reduces the amount of material that can be remembered. This means that it might be better to get a good night's sleep and study in the morning rather than staying up a few hours extra and sleeping late. It's difficult to maintain focus when normal sleeping patterns are interrupted.

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b.) A Method for Studying: SQ3R

SQ3R stands for *survey, question, read, recite* and *review*. These five elements make up a set of study habits that can enhance performance on the test.

SURVEY

"Survey" means to find the limits or borders of an area. Survey the material to be studied to get a rough idea of the content and organization of the material before beginning in-depth study efforts.

To survey a body of information, scan it from start to finish. Skimming over the pages will help get an idea of what is to come. In most documents, this type of survey is made much easier through the use of headings. Bold, large, or major headings introduce big or important elements; smaller headings introduce sub-areas of these important elements. Another helpful overview of the material can be found in summaries such as chapter summaries, overviews, or statements of objectives. Looking over such summaries will allow for a quick view of the important parts or pieces of the material covered.

Surveying the study material gives an idea of how long it will take to cover the material. This will help to break the assignment down into reasonable time blocks. Material should be read in chunks of a reasonable size. Focus on a specific section or chunk and ensure understanding before moving on. A chunk might be all of the material under a major heading. If the material under the heading runs for many pages, try reducing the material to be understood to each of the minor headings, taking one at a time.

QUESTION

Most people need a reason to do things. In studying text material, a question becomes a reason. If some questions can be predetermined, the material to be read will take on more life and be more meaningful.

Before beginning each study session, look over the material intended to be covered. Develop some questions for which answers are expected to be found. There are several ways to develop these questions. One way is to begin with the list of headings from the chapter or document outline. Write a question for each major and minor heading. Developing questions can provide a reason for reading the material and can help the information become more meaningful.

READ

For most people, reading means the same thing as studying. When they say that they have studied material, they often mean that they have read it through several times. Reading is important, but it will be done more effectively when the *survey* and *question* steps have been completed.

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The most effective way for a candidate to pace himself/herself is to decide on the number of chunks that will be read and understood in a given study session. Use the questions developed through the previous step as the definition of understanding. Once these questions are answered move on to the next section. A good time to take breaks is between these sections, not in the middle of them. This can be viewed as a reward for successfully completing the reading of each section.

It's important to ensure that the material being read is understood. One way to do this is to look up the definitions of all new and unfamiliar terms. Make a list of the words and phrases that are not understood. If these terms are technical in nature and have not been encountered before, the chances are that the answer is somewhere in the chapter or document being read.

Have a notebook available to mark down each of these terms, leaving a space for their definition. The quicker the meaning of all the terms are understood, the more effective the candidate's studying will be. If the term or word is not technical, but simply a large or uncommon word that is unfamiliar, look it up in a dictionary. It might be helpful to record the definitions of these non-technical terms in a notebook as well in order to keep track of all of the important terms, even those that are understood.

Another good way to make reading time as useful as possible is to mark or underline the text while reading. This will make each candidate a more active participant in the studying process. In addition, it will help candidates to focus on the major ideas and keep from getting bogged down in details. Underlining or highlighting can also make it easier to find relevant material later for review.

In marking or underlining the text, the candidate should actually go through the text and underline key words and concepts that are important in understanding the material in the chunk being read. The candidate might also make notes right on the text page. Here are a few guidelines to follow when using the underlining and marking method:

1. Read the whole section before doing any underlining or marking.
2. Don't mark or underline too much. The value of the technique lies in highlighting only the most important material.
3. Use ink if possible so that the underlining and notes do not disappear or become unclear in the course of studying.
4. Use symbols as much as possible. For example, use ? as a symbol for questions; use * to stand for a particularly important idea.

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RECITE

It's very helpful to recite with another individual. He or she can ask questions about portions of the material, which will make the candidate recite or locate the relevant material in a formal way. It's not necessary to choose someone who is familiar with the material. The person only has to be able to recognize that the response (what is recited) corresponds to what is written in the reference material or notes.

In order to be most effective, recitation should take place quite soon after the material has been reviewed or read for the first time. This is important because the greatest amount of information is lost or forgotten within a short period of time after it is first learned.

Don't try to cover too much information at once. Depending on the number of pages covered, this might be all of the information in one major section or chapter.

REVIEW

Reviewing the areas to be covered in the test will help each candidate to understand and organize the material better. The review should also cover the outline of how the material is organized, and where certain topics can be found.

Review is done just before beginning a new study session. In this form of review, the candidate is actually preparing for new learning by strengthening old learning. This helps to ensure that any old learning that is needed as a basis for new learning is correct and available.

Another form of review is done before a test. This review can be done quite effectively in a group with other test takers. This cuts down on some of the drudgery of pre-test studying and also increases the meaning of much of the information. That is, while taking the test, information can be more easily remembered by thinking back to who said what and how the review conversation went.

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In summary, the SQ3R method of study is based on sound learning principles and gives the candidate a simple formula to follow:

<i>SURVEY</i>	skim the reading material and create manageable chunks to study
<i>QUESTION</i>	develop a purpose for reading by asking questions that are expected to be answered in the reading material
<i>READ</i>	read and re-read the material until it is understood thoroughly
<i>RECITE</i>	write down or talk about what was just learned to improve retention and integrate new information into the knowledge base
<i>REVIEW</i>	look over highlighted text and notes and integrate new information with old information

3. General Multiple-Choice Test-Taking Strategies

The purpose of the Written Multiple-Choice Test is to assess each candidate's knowledge of the specified work components as well as how well this knowledge can be applied to specific situations. At times, factors other than knowledge of the tested material can influence performance. The following suggestions should help to reduce these extraneous influences and allow each candidate to do his/her best on the multiple-choice examination.

a.) Make sure the test format and requirements are understood

Read, and/or listen to, all of the directions carefully.

Make sure the answer sheet is correctly marked.

Be aware of how much time has been allotted to complete the test. Candidates should check their watches periodically to keep track of the amount of time remaining in the examination period.

b.) Make sure the question is understood

Read each question carefully.

Try to answer the question before looking at the choices. If the answer is known, compare it to the available choices and pick the closest alternative. A thorough understanding of the knowledge areas will allow questions to be answered without looking at the answer choices.

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Since writing in test booklets is allowed, it might be helpful to mark the test questions in a way that makes them easier to read.

Use slash marks to break down sentences into small segments. This will make the candidate more attentive to each separate idea in a long sentence.

Underline key words that tell what a sentence or passage is about. If a question has been skipped, the markings can make it easier to remember what the question was about when revisiting it, without reading the full question or passage again.

Find and circle words that "harden" or "soften" statements.

AND means that one element of the alternative must be present or true in addition to another element for the alternative to be correct.

OR means that there is a choice of situations. Only one of the elements of the alternative must be present or true for it to be a correct alternative.

c.) Proceed through the questions strategically

Skim through all materials pertaining to each scenario at least once before starting to respond to the multiple-choice items.

Read each scenario and/or examine each report pertaining to the scenario for a general understanding. Next, read each of the items associated with that scenario and return to the scenario and/or report to check the details.

Answer items in a set at the same time.

Some of the Multiple-Choice Test items may be organized around scenarios and/or reports. As a general rule, all test items associated with a set of materials (scenario and/or report) should be answered at the same time. It is very time-consuming to become re-familiarized with all of the materials for an item left unanswered in a set. If the set of items looks difficult in general, it would be more time efficient to skip the entire set of items and then come back to them later. Whenever a set of items is skipped, be sure to mark them as skipped in the test booklet so they can easily be identified.

Tackle difficult questions methodically.

Don't get bogged down if there is a word or sentence that is not understood. The main idea can be grasped without knowing the individual word or the individual sentence.

Don't be afraid to go with the first answer that comes to mind. It can be changed later but, often, first guesses are correct.

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Use the process of elimination.

If the answer to a question is not known, first eliminate those choices that are clearly wrong. Then, put a mark next to each remaining choice to indicate its status (e.g., bad, good, or possible). This will save time by reducing the number of choices needed to be re-read and re-evaluated before selecting the final choice.

Guess.

No more credit will be lost for an incorrect response than for no response, so it is to each candidate's advantage to respond to every question even if guessing is required. If the examination period is about to end and there will be a substantial number of questions (e.g., more than 5 or 10) that will not be completed, reserve some time (e.g., 60 seconds) toward the very end of the examination period to respond to these questions, even if guessing is the only option. While these guesses may not be correct, the alternative is to leave these questions blank and be assured of getting them wrong.

d.) Use extra time wisely

If you finish the examination before the test time expires, you should go back and review the responses. Make any changes that are necessary. Also make sure that your answers have been placed correctly on the answer sheet.

Finally, remember that Test Monitors will be there to help every candidate with testing procedures. If there are any questions about the testing procedures, ask for assistance before the test begins.

4. Error Analysis

There are several possible reasons for choosing an incorrect response to a question. Six of these reasons are presented below along with suggestions for avoiding such errors. Consider past tests that have been taken and identify the errors (from among the six provided here) that tend to characterize previous test-taking behavior. Once the reasons for these errors have been identified, steps can be taken to avoid repeating such errors when answering questions on this and future examinations. As previously mentioned, the suggestions laid out below are geared towards selecting the one best alternative. Listed below are various reasons incorrect answers might be selected:

a.) Marking the wrong space on the answer sheet

Since there are a limited number of questions on each examination, careless errors such as these are costly. Check as each answer choice is marked on the answer sheet to ensure that the answer chosen is the one being marked. As an additional check, after the exam is complete, go back over every question and answer it again.

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b.) Misreading a question or answer by overlooking a key word or phrase

As mentioned earlier, the solution to this problem is UNDERLINING. Underlining makes key words and phrases stand out when choosing an answer. Once key words and phrases have been underlined, check the details of the possible answers with the details underlined, one-by-one. If every detail doesn't match, consider that answer suspect and try another, always keeping in mind that you should be looking for the best possible answer.

c.) Not knowing the meaning of one or more key terms

When taking the test, if difficulty with a term is encountered, re-read the sentence to determine its meaning without worrying about the meaning of a particular word. Try to understand the general message of the sentence or paragraph. The meaning of the unfamiliar word should become clearer once the general context within which it has been placed is understood.

d.) Difficulty understanding complex or difficult questions

Divide and conquer! As mentioned earlier, use slash marks to break up the material into small segments, then concentrate on one segment at a time. One approach to difficult questions is to first read the possible answers and then re-read the question. This tells you what to concentrate on while reading the question. Concentrate on the parts of the question directly related to the possible answers even if the entire question is not understood. The entire question need not be understood to find the correct answer. Also, focus on the topic sentences that are usually the first and last sentences of a question. Read the difficult questions twice. The first time, read for the general meaning and do not get bogged down by individual words or phrases that are not understood. The second time, read for more precise understanding. The first reading will provide the context so that the second reading is more meaningful.

e.) Comparing combinations of information

This is a problem of rearranging information in the correct way so that it makes sense. Underline critical pieces of information in the test question and then compare the information with the possible answers, point-by-point.

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f.) The alternative chosen looked correct

Several factors can cause incorrect alternatives to be selected:

1. An incorrect alternative may contain an exact phrase from the relevant material (i.e., from the test question itself or the study material).
2. An incorrect alternative may contain a phrase or sentence that is used out of context. For example, an idea that is expressed but then rejected in the relevant material may be presented as an idea that was supported.

Some strategies for avoiding the tendency to fall for incorrect alternatives include:

1. Have an answer in mind before looking over the alternatives. This will lessen the possibility of choosing an incorrect alternative merely because it looks good.
2. Use the method of marking each alternative to indicate its status (e.g., bad, good, or possible) before choosing one.
3. Stick strictly to the facts or rules of the relevant material. Don't fall for alternatives that stretch or exaggerate the facts or rules described in the relevant material.
4. Be wary of alternatives with words or phrases taken exactly from the relevant material. Don't simply assume that such alternatives are correct.
5. Prepare a defense for the answer selected. Find something in the relevant material that will give a strong, direct defense for this answer.

What will happen on the day of the examination?

On the day the written examination is scheduled, plan to arrive at your designated testing site early. Due to the nature of the examination administration, **NO ONE WILL BE ADMITTED LATE.** You will be notified by mail of the time and place of the examination. Bring your notification card, two sharpened Number 2 pencils, and two forms of identification. One form of identification must include your photograph. Failure to do so may result in your being excluded from taking the examination.

Please report to your assigned room. Your room identification (a letter) will be located on the notification card. Pay attention to any SPECIAL messages that might appear on your notification card.

Can candidates request a make-up examination?

According to the New Jersey Administrative Code 4A: 4-2.9 (a), make-up examinations, except for police, fire and professional level engineering promotional examinations under (b) below, may be authorized for the following reasons:

1. Error by the Department of Personnel or Appointing Authority;
2. Serious illness or disability of the candidate on the examination date, provided the candidate submits a doctor's certificate specifying that the candidate was not able to take the examination on that day for medical reasons;

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3. Documented serious illness or death in the candidate's immediate family;
 4. Natural disaster;
 5. Prior vacation or travel plans outside of New Jersey or any contiguous state, which cannot be reasonably changed, as evidenced by a sworn statement and relevant documentation; and
 6. Other valid reasons.
- (b) For police, fire and professional level engineering promotional examinations, make-up examinations may be authorized only in cases of:
1. Debilitating injury or illness requiring an extended convalescent period, provided the candidate submits a doctor's certification containing a diagnosis and a statement clearly showing that the candidate's physical condition precluded his/her participation in the examination;
 2. Death in the candidate's immediate family as evidenced by a copy of the death certificate;
 3. A candidate's wedding that cannot be reasonably changed as evidenced by relevant documentation. (Wedding plans that are made after the publication of this Orientation Guide will not be considered valid for this examination.)
 4. Error by the Department of Personnel or Appointing Authority.

MAKE-UP REQUESTS MUST BE SUBMITTED WITHIN FIVE (5) DAYS FROM THE ORIGINAL TEST DATE.

IMPORTANT: Please review the *Medical Authorization for Make-up Promotional Examination* form DPF-728 (Public Safety or Professional Engineering) listed under "Forms" on our Home Page. (www.state.nj.us/personnel/forms)

NOTE: As of the printing of this guide, the examination make-up policy is in the process of being modified. The current make-up policy is subject to change, if changed; our web site will be updated.

What about security issues?

All candidates will be required to sign a pledge form at the examination center stating that they will not discuss the content of the examination with any candidates, individuals, groups or organizations whose interest in the test process, product or material could conflict with the objectives of the Department of Personnel.

The test booklet is copyrighted. No part of it may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the New Jersey Department of Personnel.

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Will candidates get a chance to review their answers?

Candidates will be provided with details concerning the examination review policy on the day of the examination.

If candidates have a complaint, how can they appeal?

Each comment, suggestion and appeal will be handled properly. The Department of Personnel needs to know right away about any complaints so that a fair solution can be found BEFORE examination scores are released. If a problem occurs during the administration of the examination and causes a candidate to be placed in a position of disadvantage, an objection to the manner in which the examination was administered should be filed prior to leaving the examination center. Appropriate forms will be provided for that purpose on the day of the examination.

Candidates may file a content appeal if they believe that an item is incorrectly keyed or the examination material is not appropriate for that title. Content appeals may be filed during the examination review period. On the day of the examination candidates will be provided with details of the examination review dates.

If a candidate wishes to file an appeal, he/she should be as specific as possible. Appeals based solely on opinion or rumor will not be addressed. If a candidate disagrees with a question, he/she should give specific reasons or proof as to why he/she disagrees.

The Department of Personnel will not entertain any UNSUBSTANTIATED complaints regarding breaches of security. Investigation and action will be taken only on signed complaints which are fully documented, i.e., which include the names of individuals who discussed the materials, as well as any witnesses to the discussion, nature of the discussion, and the date and place where the discussion occurred.

What happens if the examination is canceled?

If circumstances force postponement of the examination or in the case of inclement weather, the Department of Personnel will notify local radio stations, as soon as that decision has been made. Please listen to local radio stations for examination postponement information. Candidates may also call the Department of Personnel directly at (609) 292-8668 and listen to the pre-recorded message to find out the status of the examination. If the examination is canceled, the first message will provide that information.

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Conclusion

This orientation guide attempts to familiarize candidates with aspects of the Written Multiple-Choice Test, including some suggestions for preparation. The suggestions provided here are not exhaustive – we encourage candidates to engage in whatever additional preparation strategies they believe will enhance their chances of performing effectively on the examination.

Some Additional Information

As part of the evaluation process for this testing program, the written examination may include some supplemental survey or test questions. If included, these will be used for research purposes only. That is, these questions will not affect the candidate's score. The survey questions will address candidate's satisfaction with the examination process.